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Thank you Edie,

Members of the Kindergarten Union and affiliated associations, your conference seems to be an occasion for firsts. Last year your conference was the first public meeting I attended in my new role as Director ECE, and tonight is the first address I have given since my appointment. Edie, likewise, seems to have been joining in the firsts today. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to share some thoughts with you. In the process I hope you will get to know me better and not feel that Head Office, Department of Education, Wellington is such a remote place, inhabited by people who do not understand what it is like in the real world, let alone understand anything about the kindergarten movement or the education of young children.

I congratulate you on the theme for your conference: Kindergarten - a changing experience. Looking around tonight at certain familiar faces and reflecting over the 21 years since I first became involved in early education, with the birth of my first child - all I can say is, it sure is.

On a less facetious note, I see my role tonight as identifying some of the changes that are happening both within the kindergarten movement, early childhood care and education, and society, to stimulate your thinking - which I hope you will then share in your discussion groups. I intend to talk mainly in general terms, raising issues and possibly identifying problems. I will leave you the hard work to come up with possible solutions.

In early childhood education using sound developmental learning principles I, as the teacher, provide you with the learning environment so that you can embark on a journey of autonomous self discovery which enables you to gain mastery over information and in the process gain skills to control your environment. The fundamental question for you, and the Minister touched on this point this morning, is for you to decide what sort of organisation you are.

Who do you provide a service for and how will you deliver this service? Like all other institutions which have been established for a long time, your role and response to changing needs in society has shaped the kindergarten movement into a well organised and effective organisation. You yourselves are still in the process of reshaping your management structure to suit today's conditions. One of the dangers of your new structure, and one I am sure you are keenly aware of, is the dilemma I touched on in my opening remark about the Head Office of the Department of Education. I was hinting at the danger of remoteness from your client group. There is an inherent conflict between the closeness of a small group and the ease with which communication can move in a small organisation, to the difficulties and breakdowns in communication which inevitably beset large organisations. The client or user often feels powerless to influence what is happening to them and it results in statements like, 'they have decided'. If I, as director of early childhood, or Edie or Brian as your President, or Bernice as your Executive Officer, get too remote

from you, the associations, and more importantly from today's parents, then we could all be in danger of negotiating policies which are inappropriate for today's needs.

I am sure you will not let this happen but it is a two-way commitment. People in central decision-making positions must keep in touch with kindergartens in the field and you must keep us constantly informed and aware of needs and changes. I would like to suggest to you that defining what the role and function of the kindergarten movement is, in the 1980's, may not be an easy task. In no way do I want my next statement to be taken wrongly, and it is not meant as a criticism. But I would like you to reflect on my comment that your poster with the theme 'Kids Luv Kindy because Kindy loves Kids' may not be enough. I have no doubt that most children love attending kindergarten. It is one of the joys and inherent rewards of teaching kindergarten children. They do like being there and they do enjoy it. Laughter, smiles, physical comforting and joy are central to the creation of a comfortable kindergarten learning environment, but children are brought to kindergarten by parents - and they need to love kindergarten as well.

Early childhood research is increasingly revealing the important central role of the parent. They need to feel comfortable and at home in the kindergarten also. I wonder how comfortable some parents feel? Do you ever feel like a giant in a kindergarten? I do. How many of you have endured meetings sitting on small seats where the pain in your legs, and the fear that your weight is about to cause the chair to collapse, predominated your thinking?

Have we really given enough thought to making our kindergartens a welcoming place for adults? I have no criticism about the warmth of the reception from the teachers or fellow parents in the kindergarten, but I have always felt that the environment told me very clearly this was Lilliput land and my body was too big.

If we do want parents to stay with their children to enjoy sharing their learning and discovery, perhaps we could give more thought to the design of our kindergarten buildings, so that adults also feel there is a place for them. I am well aware that this has a cost implication, but we should at least begin thinking about it.

Continuing my thoughts on creating a welcoming environment for adults, I would also like to raise a question, 'who are the parents in your kindergarten?' What is their ethnic background? What beliefs do they hold about how to rear children? How much do they know about young children? What skills have they to assist them with this task? To those of you who are parents, I would like to cast your minds back to the first contact you made with kindergarten - how did you feel? I remember my own feelings of apprehension. What will the teacher think of me? I wondered how my child would react. I was mortified when she threw a temper tantrum on the pavement outside and all the parents stared at me, watching how I would handle the situation.

There are many times, as a parent of young children, that I wish the ground would just swallow me up. I was inexperienced in child management and my contact with pre-school exposed my vulnerability. Parents, just like I was, often experience their first public contact and exposure as parents, when they first join a kindergarten.

Yesterday I received a new publication from the Department of Statistics which I think could help you answer the question, 'who are your clients?' Profile on women, but it has all sorts of statistics about labour, the labour market, employment trends, marriage, family, education, and I do recommend this booklet to you.

Some of the pieces of information that I managed to snatch in the few hours since I received the booklet are things like, that in 1966 20.4% of married women 25-29 years had their first baby but in 1983 this had risen to 38.8%. Furthermore, 73% in 1966 had their first child in the first year or two of marriage, now only 45% do and most delay until 3-10 years of marriage. In fact, 4.5% in 1966, went to 18.3%, delayed their children until after the 4th year of marriage. What significance is that for the kindergarten? It means that you are dealing with older parents, and parents who are likely to have one, and at the most, two children. These parents quite often have delayed having their children till they have a certain amount of material assets behind them. I think they are going to demand more quality provision from our service. Think of our teachers and their skills in dealing with these older parents. Furthermore 5% of our population are in defacto relationships. We need to be very careful how we word our notices to adults in the kindergarten, and parents in the kindergartens, and not make an assumption that they are all living in the traditional two-parent family. The marrying age for women has gone up from 23 to 27 and likewise more men are over 30 when they first marry. In terms of the workforce 19.9% of married women worked in 1966, in 1981 it was 35.8% and that trend is increasing. How well do we prepare our teachers to understand these parents? Marjorie Renwick's research tells us that our Division E training is making some headway with this, but we still have some way to go. It is my hope that when we get extended training for kindergarten teachers emphasis will be placed on assisting our trainees even more, in their important task of working with parents as well as with children.

I have told you some of my feelings as a mother who in today's terminology would be called a 'yump' - a 'young inwardly mobile pakeha'. How do other parents feel who have not always lived in urban environments, may not have spent their childhood in New Zealand, are not familiar with our education system or our ideas on child management? How comfortable do they feel when they first join kindergarten?

Early childhood has in the last 100 years been mainly the prerogative of women. Women staff most of the kindergartens and as I look around this audience, women predominate. But I must say in comparison to other early childhood organisations you have a higher proportion of men here than some of the other groups. Do we consciously or unconsciously structure the system to keep fathers

and the involvement of men limited? Gulliver learnt a lot in Lilliput land, and perhaps there is a rich and rewarding world of discovery for fathers, and for male kindergarten teachers in our kindergarten system.

This brings me to the importance of first impressions. I would encourage you to go back home and visit the kindergartens in your association with new eyes. Put on glasses which enable you to see the experience from a beginning parents point of view and examine your introductory processes, the new parents, how welcome does the kindergarten make most parents feel, what does the local committee do to help parents feel welcome or is this left to the teacher?

By answering the question 'what is the kindergarten movement and for whom do you provide', I think you will sort out your future role. It will help you decide how much you wish to change, whether change is necessary, or whether the service you already provide is sustainable and meeting today's needs. Do you see your role as catering for all children and their families? In which case you may need to attend to social change and the trends in society which I have mentioned. Or do you see your role as providing a particular type of educational service which meets the needs of some families in the community?

The changing role of women, and the increasing number of women with young children, who seek paid employment is creating a need for care of children on a longer basis per day than 3 hours. Do you see your movement catering for these children on an extended day basis? There is also an increasing number of families seeking care and education for children before the age of 4 years. Will your service continue to provide mainly for three and four year olds? Families in semi-rural areas are now seeking early childhood education on a regular basis. Do you wish to adapt your service to cater for their needs? I think the answer is yes. Mobile kindergartens are an example of meeting the needs of rural children. They are also an example of diversification within the kindergarten service. Itinerant kindergarten teachers are another. However, the scattered population groupings of rural children may require us to ask whether a 3-4 year old age cutoff is appropriate. Might it be better to have a wider age range and include children 0-5 years in flexible groupings, which enable children to have regular and ongoing contact with the children they will eventually go to school with?

Lazar's research confirms that the earlier pre-school education begins the better, and that frequency of contact is important. Rural children may not be disadvantaged if they couldn't attend a form of pre-school education from an early age, but not attend so frequently on a weekly basis because of the restrictions on parents' time and inherent travel costs. Should we be working more closely with the early childhood section of the Correspondence School, to develop a co-ordinated system of individual correspondence programmes, combined with regular group experiences? Is this your role or the Department of Education's? I have been aware that your movement has often debated the word 'free' and its meaning. One of the tenets of early childhood philosophy is that parents should take prime responsibility for the care and education

of young children. Extended day care is an expensive provision from the provider's viewpoint. If your movement decided to make moves into greater provision of extended day care, would you still be able to promote the word 'free'? Would parents be expected, or because of the staff-intensive nature of extended day care, would it become necessary for you to require some financial commitment from parents?

Another highly valued principle of early childhood education has been and still is, the voluntary commitment of people in the community. If your movement was to decide that it should diversify its service to meet the educational needs of all young children, would this put too greater strain on the voluntary commitment of people? At what point does voluntary work become a full time occupation deserving monetary remuneration? As your movement has grown and the demands for quality service increased, a need for an administrative or management support system is created. To what extent can this remain voluntary and, if not, who pays the managers? Associations are largely made up of people who give freely of their time on a voluntary basis, you are the employers of paid professionals and you do an extremely good job of managing and supporting the staff in your employment. However, it is a system which has an inherent undercurrent of potential tension. Your rewards for service are in the satisfaction of seeing a kindergarten system which is providing quality education for young children. You give of your time freely to work for others who are getting paid for what they do in the same service. I understand that one of your members has to lose a day's pay to be a member of a recently established working party. I'm going to try and do something about that if I can.

Tonight I have focused on exploring the question put to you this morning by the Minister of Education, which was 'do you see yourselves as provider's for all types of community need or as an organisation providing a particular type of early childhood service?' It is an important question and has far-reaching implications. I have only touched on a few tonight.

The Department of Education is supportive of the moves you are making already to bring about greater flexibility in your service. Our job, like yours, is to ensure that the children who attend kindergarten get the best quality programme we can provide.

In the past our energies and your's have been mainly directed to the establishment of kindergartens. Now we can, and have been in recent years, concentrating on the quality of that service and much progress has been made in terms of the kindergarten environment and the conditions of service for the teachers. With the likelihood of improved staffing, emphasis will be given to what we actually do in kindergartens. Last week a national course examined the question of how to provide the best learning programmes for young children. How do we prepare children for tomorrow's world? Rosemary Renwick, who is in the audience tonight, directed that course, so, if you want to find out what happened, ask Rosemary.

I believe that the developmental learning methods, which form the basis of the kindergarten programmes, are the most suitable

learning style for young children. But this method requires highly trained and skilled teachers to be really effective and it is reliant on adequate, that is small adult/child ratios. In fact, Jeanie McCafferty gave me an article by David Weikhart today and he actually talks about a high staffing ratio to 1 to 5, and you can have too many adults, though it would be hard to go much above 1 to 10. Now even with our staffing improvement of 3 teachers in a 40/40, that's 1 to 13, so we still have some way to go in really getting an effective adult/child ratio in terms of quality provision.

Some of the other things he said in this article, and I want to read them to you because he is actually visiting NZ this week, (so watch for articles in the paper by him). He is due to visit Wellington on Friday and I think Bernice is going to come to the meeting. He has, I think, one of the most exciting early childhood programmes in America. 'When the practice is good the play curriculum can be marvellous. But often even where the commitment to children is tremendous and language is great, when you look at what is happening you find an enormous wastage of time and the children are often doing exactly what teachers tell them, in a ritualised way. The teacher must fit in with the children's intentions if she wants to bring in concepts like number, or spatial relationships. She has to enter into the children's play, that is a very hard skill for an adult to do. People think cognitive means academic, but we mean it in a psychological sense - problem-solving understanding. We are finding ways of encouraging children to project and form theories, use language to explain, experiment to try things out, to use scientific method. He also believes that helping children to make choices and to take responsibility to gain mastery over concepts and materials is one of the best ways of promoting their social and emotional development.

Those are not new ideas to New Zealanders in early childhood education, but I think it bears us rethinking about the way we encourage those skills within our kindergarten environment. Likewise, Valerie Podmore recently did some research on Playcentre mothers' interactive behaviour with their children's pre-school assessments. She suggested that the frequency of direct commands ~~cognitive~~ works inversely with children's performance on cognitive and language tasks. She concluded her research report on raising the question of the practical implication of her finding, in terms of its relevance to early childhood care and education.

I would respond by saying it has great importance in terms of how we train teachers to interact and talk with young children. It requires great skill to elicit verbal comment from children, to provide children with a rich vocabulary and understanding of their world and to gain their co-operation and action, whilst minimising the amount of directiveness in verbal interactions. That is, commands. This is one of the skills of a teacher using developmental methods and it takes time and practice and experience to gain. These are the sorts of things that I hope we'll have more time to concentrate on in an extended training.

I do not personally support any suggestion that the improved staffing should be used to take kindergarten teachers out of the kindergarten in which children are present. The new staffing component has been put in place to improve the learning of the children attending. I can see flexible use of staff for more family contact in the two half days reserved for non-contact with the enrolled children. In fact in this article by David Weikhart they mentioned they had family contact for 1½ hours per week. That's a fairly high home visiting type programme, and it was for 35 children. The management of the improved staffing ratio will be the subject of a national course in October this year. This conference may like to have an input to that course by way of comment. To conclude I would like to read to you a paragraph from an article by Betty Caldwell and Margery Friar on daycare and early education.

I found this paragraph in a chapter on public policy in early childhood education, edited by B Spodeck in 1982. Betty Caldwell and Margery Friar pose the question 'if the two fields of daycare and session care merge, what will be the distinctive role of early childhood education as currently defined?'

Their response is as follows: 'We are on the threshold of seeing daycare as the model early childhood environment rather than as a non-traditional alternative. As more women enter the workforce and, as it possibly becomes socially unacceptable for them not to do so, what will be the role of the traditional half day pre-school? Likewise, as public schools become more aware of their obligations to perform relevant service for families, by lengthening or adjusting the school day to accommodate work schedules, will there be less interest in the availability of part day or part week programmes? Many traditional part day early childhood programmes have already become clearly class-orientated, as only families with a certain pattern of social and economic background can use them.'

In the years to come early childhood education will need to answer these questions in order to ensure its own survival.

Thank you very much.